

*Chair Mackenzie, L. Heminger, A. Frenier, A. Bockelman,
Ken Kirkby, info@plnbayarea.org*
Bay Area Transportation Working Group (BATWG)
for response by 5/25

Jake Mackenzie, Chair
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
375 Beale Street Suite 800
S.F. CA 94105

May 15, 2017
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Subject: 2017 Draft RTP DEIR Comments

Dear Mr. Mackenzie:

On or about May 7, 2017 you received a letter from the Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund (TRANSDEF) describing what would be needed to bring MTC's RTP into conformity with AB 32 and SB 375. BATWG associates itself with and generally supports the sentiments expressed in TRANSDEF's letter.

Thanks to the good work of the Schwarzenegger and Brown Administrations, the Obama Administration and the automotive industry, cars and trucks are less energy-consuming and polluting than they used to be. This has reduced GHG emissions some, but not enough to meet State targets.

The MTC Staff often takes credit for these outside achievements, but has made no discernible effort to reduce Bay Area VMT. Yet without VMT reduction there can be no hope of meeting these State targets. Instead of addressing the Bay Area's most critical transportation challenges; namely reducing the flow of traffic and improving public transit, MTC has consistently promoted its highway-expanding HOT lane program and other projects designed to induce still more solo driving. In addition it has frittered away much of the Region's limited supply of public transit funds on pet projects of minor consequence. (Examples of this abound; if there is interest we can provide a list).

As Mr. Schonbrunn noted, without a more enlightened set of Bay Area land use and transportation policies and practices, the Bay Area will be unable to fulfill either its AB-32 obligation to reduce GHG emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, or the SB 375 goal of reducing the total emissions from cars and trucks.

If, on the other hand, MTC assumes the responsibility of protecting the Bay Area from the adverse effects of sprawl and excessive driving, the improvement opportunities are there:

First, there could be an immediate end to the mid-20th Century practice of expanding roadways "to meet demand". It has long been recognized that expanding roadways induces more traffic and therefore soon results in more regional congestion. This one should be obvious by now.

Second, a greater effort could be made to ensure that new housing, no matter where located, affords residents an opportunity to leave their cars at home, at least some of the time. Putting a few hundred units of housing near a infrequent bus line or two is not "transit-oriented" in any meaningful sense of the phrase. Putting units near a BART station well served by buses is a start, but more is needed.

Third, the program for developing an effective and well-integrated Bay Area network of trains and buses, essentially abandoned in the 1980's after the completion of the original BART system, could be re-established. Focusing on this goal would soon end the current practice of squandering scarce transportation resources on ill-conceived pet and parochial projects.

Fourth, once a useable network of trains and buses began to take shape, highway and congestion pricing fees could gradually be imposed as required to bring regional congestion and GHG emissions down to manageable levels.

As things stand the Bay Area's chances of meeting State and federal GHG emission standards are nil and regional traffic congestion is getting worse. However as indicated above, with the right regional program things can get better. To get the job done will require innovative leadership, patience, persistence and hard work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gerald Cauthen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "C".

Gerald Cauthen, Chair
Bay Area Transportation Working Group
900 Paramount Road
Oakland CA 94610
510 208 5441
510 708 7880